

VZCZCXYZ0001
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHCH #0132/01 0571329
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 261329Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY CHISINAU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7677
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CHISINAU 000132

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/UMB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/23/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV PBTS UP MD
SUBJECT: SMIRNOV IN A SNIT AGAIN

Classified by: Ambassador Asif J. Chaudhry for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: It appears that EU and U.S. relations with Transnistria are now going to take a turn for the worse. In a February 19 meeting, Ukrainian Ambassador Pirozhkov briefed us on his meeting the previous day with Transnistrian leader Smirnov. Apparently angered by the EU's recent announcement extending its visa ban on Smirnov and other Transnistrian officials, Smirnov told the Ukrainian Ambassador that European and American ambassadors would no longer be welcome in Transnistria. Smirnov also told Pirozhkov that he did not recognize the 5-plus-2 format any more. Smirnov said that while in Moscow he had promised to meet with Voronin in March, and apparently agreed to a 2-plus-1 meeting as well. In hopes of achieving a breakthrough on the stalled border demarcation process, the Ukrainians were organizing a conference in Odessa on February 27 with the support of EUBAM. End summary.

¶2. (C) In a February 19 meeting with Ambassador Chaudhry, visiting EUR/UMB Office Director Bob Boehme, and Pol/Econ Section Chief, Ukrainian Ambassador Sergei Pirozhkov described his meeting with Transnistrian "President" Smirnov the previous day (February 18). Smirnov had invited the Ukrainian Ambassador for a meeting in order to provide a debrief on his recent trip to Moscow to meet Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and his stop in Kyiv en route home. While in Kyiv, Smirnov had met with Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Ogryzko.

"You Can Bury 5-plus-2"

¶3. (C) Incensed by the EU's recent announcement extending its visa ban on certain Transnistrian authorities (Smirnov is number one on the list), Smirnov had retorted that "the EU and U.S. Ambassadors would no longer be acceptable guests in Transnistria." Smirnov further declared that he did not want any relationship with the EU and went on to say that he would no longer recognize the 5-plus-2 format. "You can simply bury 5-plus-2" the Transnistrian leader had told Pirozhkov. Instead, Smirnov would work directly with Russia and Ukraine, meeting occasionally with the Moldovans as needed. Pirozhkov speculated that while in Moscow Smirnov had accepted Lavrov's proposal for the 2-plus-1 format, and thus would now serve to impede the 5-plus-2 format. Pirozhkov speculated that there would be greater clarity on the next steps following Lavrov's February 23-24 visit to Chisinau.

¶4. (C) Smirnov told Pirozhkov that a meeting with Voronin was being planned for March. Though Smirnov had no desire for such a meeting, while in Moscow he had promised to participate. When asked whether a 2-plus-1 meeting could end with the signing of a Joint Declaration, Smirnov had told the Ukrainian Ambassador that he did not exclude such a possibility. Pirozhkov speculated that; as the main goal of Smirnov's trip was to obtain financial assistance from Russia, Smirnov was ready to do anything requested by Moscow in exchange. Pirozhkov concluded that Smirnov would now escalate confrontation with the EU and U.S., escalate conflict with 5-plus-2, and not do anything constructive.

Talking with the Transnistrians on Border Demarcation

¶5. (C) Ambassador Pirozhkov said he had told Smirnov that it was a high priority for Ukraine to conduct demarcation of the segment of the Ukrainian border with Moldova that Transnistria controls. Pirozhkov said that the Ukrainians have been negotiating with the Transnistrians on border demarcation for over a year, since early 2008. Pirozhkov said that the border wiggled village by village and field by field, so it was necessary to have the participation of local villagers and farmers who knew exactly where the line was. Though Smirnov did not reject the Ukrainian proposal for demarcation, so far he had done nothing to start the process.

¶6. (C) In response to Ambassador Chaudhry's question about Ukraine negotiating directly with Transnistria, Pirozhkov said that Smirnov had declared his readiness to sign any protocols for demarcation, but without Moldova. When Ukraine had responded that a signing could not happen without Moldova, Smirnov had reportedly responded that "if Ukraine won't sign with me, then I won't allow Moldovan representatives on my territory."

¶7. (C) As a way out of this negotiating dead end, the Ukrainians had initiated, together with Moldova, discussions with EUBAM about participating in the demarcation process. The Ukrainians consulted with the EU, received a positive answer, and had decided to hold a conference in Odessa on February 27th. The conference will bring together specialists from Ukraine, Moldova and Transnistria under the supervision of EUBAM to work on developing concrete technical measures for demarcation. Pirozhkov said he believed that starting the demarcation process would be a significant help for the Transnistrian settlement process.

Smirnov not Interested in Economic Cooperation Projects

¶8. (C) Within the framework of confidence-building measures, the Ukrainians plan to introduce an economic cooperation project involving the regions bordering the Dniester, i.e., the Vinnitsya region of Ukraine, northern districts of Moldova such as Soroca and Ocnita, and the Kaminka District of Transnsitria. Pirozhkov said that this proposal had support from the EU, and that the Moldovan side had also expressed some support. The idea was to initiate a project that would be attractive to the local population. They had agreed to hold

a founding seminar in Soroca on February 24. Pirozhkov said that in initial discussions a year ago, Smirnov had agreed that Kaminka District would participate, but during their February 18 meeting, Smirnov had changed his mind and declared that the Transnistrian representative would not attend. Pirozhkov believed this proved that Smirnov did not want any economic contacts and cooperation with the right bank but noted that Smirnov had asked for four days to think it over and had promised a final answer on February 23.

¶9. (C) Smirnov had gone on to say that all of the confidence-building measures established as a result of his meeting with Voronin had showed no result to date. He said cynically that after discussions at each working group, the participants said that they needed to consult with their leadership, and hence were not empowered to make any actual decisions.

¶10. (C) Pirozhkov told us that, with respect to MCC, Smirnov had commented that he was not very interested. He had said that he was not interested because he did not travel on those roads.

Comment

¶11. (C) This is not the first time that Smirnov has had a snit and tightened Transnistria's travel regime for diplomats. Similar travel difficulties followed the Georgia conflict in August 2008, and the EU's visa ban announcement last year; in each case, restrictions lightened up again after a few weeks. Parliamentary speaker Shevchuk had introduced legislation seeking to regularize diplomatic travel, but that draft is now tied up as a result of Smirnov's veto, and has come to represent the differences dividing the two leaders. Coming on the heels of this visit to Moscow, Smirnov's desire to circumvent 5-plus-2 would seem to reflect a Russian strategy to move the arena of action over to a 2-plus-1 format. At any rate, there was little expectation of any 5-plus-2 progress in the period leading up to Moldova's April elections. The GOM, negotiators and observers need to stand firm on their declarations that the 5-plus-2 is the only format for negotiating a settlement, and by the time Moldova's electoral season has passed, Transnistria may adopt a more cooperative posture. While Smirnov's remarks about MCC give some cause for concern, we already understood that there were hardliners within the Transnistrian hierarchy who oppose MCC. However, there are also those who understand its value and the Transnistrian representative at the February 9 meeting of the Transportation Working Group once again pledged Transnistria's intention to cooperate and provide unimpeded access for the MCC feasibility studies.

CHAUDHRY